

ARCHIE M. BOLSTER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: January 24, 1992

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: January 24, 1992. This is an interview with Archie M. Bolster on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I wonder if you would give me a little about your background...where you were born, grew up, were educated, etc.?

BOLSTER: I grew up in Montana which was a rather unusual background for people in the Foreign Service. I left my boyhood home of Bozeman, Montana in 1945 with my parents to go overseas to live in Iran. My father took a job as the first agricultural attaché¹/₂ that we ever had in Iran. He had been recruited under the Foreign Service Auxiliary arrangement which was a brand new way to bring specialized knowledge into the Foreign Service to do specialized jobs. Having been trained as an agricultural economist he was then recruited to go overseas in this job. So we left New Year's Eve of 1945.

Q: How old were you?

BOLSTER: Well, I was born in 1933 so I was only twelve.

Q: Did you get any feeling of the tenseness with the Soviets sitting up in Azerbaijan area?

BOLSTER: Yes, we certainly did. In fact, when we arrived there in early 1946 and eventually got settled after living in a hotel, my father started to take trips around the country in line with his work to estimate crop yields and do the type of reporting that agricultural attaché¹/₂s do. On one of his trips he tried to go to Azerbaijan and was turned back by the Soviet guards at Qazvin and told that he could not go into that area of the country. He tried to argue his way in by saying that he was attached to the American Embassy, but the guard was very firm and he couldn't go in there.

I wasn't along on that trip, but another time we were in the town of Karaj, just northwest of Tehran. We had been visiting an agricultural college out there. We started back to the city and on the way we passed the Iranian troops going to retake Azerbaijan. That was the time when Iran took back their Azerbaijan province after the Soviets pulled out their support for the puppet government there. That was an exciting time for a young boy to see that.

Q: Where did you go to college?

BOLSTER: After time in both Iran and Holland, I came back and went to one year of high school and then went to the University of Virginia in 1951. That was the time when I first became a resident of this area.

Q: What attracted you towards foreign affairs? Was this your early experience or were there other factors?

BOLSTER: I think it certainly was that experience of living overseas, although living in the Netherlands wasn't as different. Living in Iran was a really different experience for someone of that age. I found it all fascinating and as I debated various ideas about what career I might pursue, I kept ending up with something to do with international affairs. So I decided to major in foreign affairs at the University of Virginia.

Q: How did you get into the Foreign Service?

BOLSTER: Like so many people I took the exam although it was a bit difficult to work out since I was in the Navy for three years right after college. But I was able to take the exam and when I passed that I was able to go for my orals during the middle of my Naval career. After completion of that short career of three years of active duty, having been in the ROTC program, I went immediately into the Foreign Service.

Q: When did you go in?

BOLSTER: July, 1958.

Q: What was your first assignment in the Foreign Service?

BOLSTER: Well, strangely enough they needed volunteers to become disbursing officers. I had never done much of anything of this type but they said the advantage was for the two of us who volunteered for this out of my class, would be the first ones to go overseas and the others would be posted in Washington. So the two of us indeed did go overseas. George Clift went to Havana and I went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The rest of our colleagues stayed in Washington. I was already back from Cambodia and ready to go to Persian language training when a lot of my colleagues were still on their first tour in Washington.

Q: What was the situation in Cambodia? You were there from 1959-60. This must have been a rather interesting time.

BOLSTER: Well, it was and we were fortunate enough to be there at a time when there was a bit of a lull between various period of upheaval in Cambodia. We were able to travel around by car and things like that. There were a few incidents that started to occur about the time we left. Tire slashing and things like that that were clearly done to put some kind of pressure on the US. But we were able to live a fairly normal life there.

Q: How did you feel about being a disbursing officer? Did you feel out in right field as far as the Embassy was concerned?

BOLSTER: Not really because it was an executive job like so many things are and you have a staff of people who are trained to do all the accounting, the writing of checks, etc. You are responsible for the conduct of the office and financially responsible for all the millions of dollars that you control in that job, but as long as you run it properly it is really quite a manageable job.

After I got my feet on the ground and got fairly use to the job, I then began to ask for other types of work so that I could broaden out my career. So I was able to go up sort of half days to work in the political section helping with summaries of the press. They used to send in a weekly airgram. I don't know if anyone ever read it, but there was a weekly summary of the local press. It took a lot of reading. I couldn't read Cambodian, obviously, so there were translators who translated specific Cambodian language articles into French. So I read those translations and the French language press and summarized the main points. That was an interesting activity to get into and I was included in all of the normal types of receptions, work cocktail parties, etc.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

BOLSTER: William Trimble.

Q: What was his style of operating?

BOLSTER: I found him a very organized and proper person who was not very easy to get to know at the beginning in an informal way. But he was a very caring and decent person. Very nice to deal with when you got to know him a little better. I always felt a little bit sorry for him because he had come into the Service under the Wriston program having risen fairly high in the Civil Service in Washington and then went to Bonn as DCM. From there he came to Cambodia as Ambassador. I always thought that was quite a cruel transition for someone to go from Germany to tropical Cambodia. Also dealing with Sihanouk was a real chore because he was so hard to get to analyze, it was hard to predict what he would do next.

Q: He was erratic as least from our standpoint.

BOLSTER: Very erratic from our point of view. From his point of view he was simply being flexible in dealing with situations as they arose.

Q: I heard stories that everybody used to watch his weight because at a certain point he would start a diet and then he would get really erratic.

BOLSTER: Well, I have also been to rallies where he spoke before tens of thousands of Cambodians...he would do these things fairly regularly and every once in a while when something was not going his way he would resign. He would tell everyone that he had done his best and tried his hardest and you still are not satisfied so he quits. Then, of course, there would be moanings and wailings and everyone would demand that he change his mind. Then he would agree to keep on.

He played the crowds. He was looked upon as almost a god by the people in rural Cambodia. I have heard stories of him going on trips and everyone just bowing down to the ground in front of him and believing that everything he said was not just word from their prince, but a god.

Q: Despite all the convolutions Cambodia has gone through, he is still around.

BOLSTER: Yes, it is really incredible. It was like turning the clock back seeing him go back to Cambodia last year. He is a real survivor, you have to say that for him.

Q: You left there in 1960 and went back to Persian training, is that right?

BOLSTER: Yes. I had requested hard language training. My first choice was Arabic and my second choice was Persian or Farsi. I was assigned to the 10-month course at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and because of the timing I had to come back before I had completed my two year tour. I felt good about leaving Cambodia because I had worked with my deputy to the extent that he became disbursing officer and ran the job single-handedly, whereas I had been one of two Americans. So I was pleased that this assistant who had moved up and done a nice job. So we really in effect cut one American position from the payroll.

Q: You then served in Iran from 1961-66. Where did you go first and what was the situation when you arrived in Iran?

BOLSTER: I, of course, had done a lot of studying about Iran in the course of taking Farsi. This was the time when the Amini government was in power and they were looked upon as somewhat favored by the United States. We wanted them to make the country progress and Amini was sort of the fellow who could do this as the Shah was going to give him a certain amount of leeway in running things to try to meet certain goals that were shared between the two governments. That was more or less the atmosphere when I arrived there.

I went to Tabriz where my assignment was as vice consul. I was doing all kinds of different jobs but very little consular work because there were so few people applying for visas up there. While I was there one of the main tenets of the Shah's evolving program was first three, then six and eventually twelve points of the white revolution.

The main point of the three at the beginning was land reform. I found it fascinating to get into that because having studied economics in college as well as foreign affairs, I was interested in this subject. Right there on my doorstep began the first land reform pilot project in a town called Maragheh in Azerbaijan. As vice consul it was my job to go down there, look into what was happening and write reports on the land reform program.

Q: I have heard it said that the Shah went through these white revolutions to make the Western world, particularly the Americans, feel happy but it really didn't do much. What was your impression of how this was working?

BOLSTER: Actually I think it did a lot. It, of course, was eventually oversold and the accomplishments were overplayed. But land reform, itself, was really quite substantial. It was substantial for several reasons. One of them was that, as I mentioned, the Shah was giving Amini room to make a lot of decisions, at least as long as they didn't affect his own power base. In his cabinet was Arsanjani, who was this Iranian economist who became the Minister of Agriculture. He was determined to make land reform effective and in fact used it to improve his own power base. He always gave credit to the Shah, of course, but he didn't mind if many peasants had it in mind that they got their land through him, the Minister of Agriculture. Eventually the Shah did have him moved out of his job because he was getting too popular and sent him off to be ambassador in Italy. That was a way to cutting Arsanjani down to size.

After he left the land reform program never quite did as much in the later stages as it did in the beginning. But it was quite an effective program. I went down and studied it to the extent that I used my Farsi to talk with villagers and people who actually had gotten land and how they were getting along. My conclusion was basically that people who received land were quite able to till; they knew what to do; they were excited about having land and worked much harder on the land when they knew it was theirs.

Q: Prior to that had it been a big landlord system?

BOLSTER: Yes. People were owned almost like serfs. They were attached to their village and the village was owned by the landlord. Typically they had a five part division of the harvest. The person who provided the land got one-fifth; the laborer got one-fifth; the water, the seed, the draft animals, etc. So that in most cases the landlord got four-fifths of what was produced. The farmer just got the fifth representing his labor because he couldn't provide draft animals, water, seed. All of these things were provided by the landlord.

Q: What was the political situation in Tabriz? You were there from when to when?

BOLSTER: Well, 1961-63. The political situation there was that the land reform program was matched by some other programs that were less popular. One was giving the women the right to vote. I got to know several neighbors near where I lived and was having tea with this retired colonel one afternoon and we were discussing current events. He said, "I am really bothered by giving the women the right to vote." I said, "Well, why is that?" He said, "Well, it is a scientific fact that women's brains are only half as big as men's and therefore if you give them the vote they won't know what to do with it. They won't understand the issues and it will be just a disaster." But aside from that kind of Neanderthal reasoning there were also many people who just felt that it would be sort of an upheaval in a religious sense too. Men always ran everything outside of the house. They did all the marketing which involved going to the bazaar and all. All business and work transactions were all things that men handled. Women were supposed to just stay home, cook, and take care of children, etc. They really felt that it was an upheaval of their whole way of life to have to give women the right to vote.

Q: Did you have any feel about the power of the Mullahs in that area during your time?

BOLSTER: Yes, you certainly had the clear impression of how important religion was to people because every Friday there were gatherings in all the various neighborhoods. People would take turn hosting receptions open to the people in the neighborhood who went to the same mosque. You could tell that it was a very serious religious attitude on the part of people. They really were concerned about the modernization program, the Shah was maybe eating away at their traditional values. And, indeed, when there were gradually more protests and expressions of unhappiness about the Shah's reform program, they had their own less important but nevertheless riots up in Tabriz that had to be controlled by the police, etc. They were similar to those that were organized down in Tehran in 1963.

Q: I have the feeling that up in Tabriz you were playing the often usual role of a small consulate which was that you were more easily able to monitor what was happening in the town than would be the case of an embassy where you are overwhelmed with the society and the bureaucracy, etc.

BOLSTER: That is very true. Tabriz, although a city of over 300,000, had the flavor of a small town. Among the elite everyone knew what everyone was doing pretty much. It was a gossipy sort of place where anything that happened would be commented on by everybody. It was sort of like living in a goldfish bowl in a sense. Anything that Europeans did was much more observed and watched than the activities of the citizens there. But in any case there were concerns about the reform program.

At the same time we were doing other types of activities. We were keeping track of the Kurds and their situation because the Consul, Bill Eagleton, was reporting constantly on events in Kurdistan and how they were being treated by the central government, which is another major issue. Of course, Bill is one of our best experts on the Kurds and has also done a lot of work on textiles. He has written a book on textile making in Iran, carpets of various kinds. So there were all kinds of things going on there in addition to these reform movements.

Q: Did you find you were sort of reporting one world and the Embassy was reporting another?

BOLSTER: Actually we were quite coordinated. The consulates did report independently...they sent in airgrams, telegrams directly to the Department...but we also did a lot of cooperative reporting where comments and information from all the consulates, that is from Kermanshah, Isfahan, Mashed and Tabriz would be combined in the Embassy in larger think pieces.

For example, an assessment of the Shah's reform program would have in it contributions from the consulates in addition to analysis from the Embassy. I think there was a fairly successful attempt to integrate reporting from the posts.

Q: Then I gather you didn't feel that the Embassy had a line that it was pursuing vis-a-vis the Shah and the consulates had better fit into this scheme. Later on this did happen under the Nixon/Kissinger period.

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: But I take it this was not the case?

BOLSTER: No, I think it was probably because of the personality and Foreign Service background of our Ambassador, Julius Holmes. He was a fantastic person and extremely generous in being willing to find out from the consulates what their views were and to incorporate that into the Embassy reporting. I remember as, of course, a very junior vice consul, going to Tehran on pouch runs and attending Embassy staff meetings, and actually being asked by the Ambassador to give a brief explanation as to how things were going in Tabriz and what our views were on current events, etc. It made you feel that you were really part of the team. You weren't being told that the Embassy knows what is happening.

Q: Which does happen in some places.

BOLSTER: Yes. But certainly Holmes made it very clear in the Embassy that he wanted reporting to bubble up from people in the Embassy and consulates who were in touch with Iranians and knew what was going on. He did not try to stage manage everything that was said. He, of course, dealt with the Shah and did all that reporting, but he certainly did defer to our judgments as to what was actually happening on the ground.

Q: When did you leave Tabriz?

BOLSTER: I left in the summer of 1963, went on home leave and then came back in the late fall.

Q: You were then in Tehran?

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: What were you doing there?

BOLSTER: I came back and worked in the consular section for a while because there was a rotation program where people rotated into different jobs. I did both nonimmigrant visas and then citizenship and passport work before I then moved over into the Embassy.

Q: How did you find, I am speaking as an old consular officer who used to run into ripples from the Iranian situation through Iranian students applying for visas in Belgrade...how did you find the Iranian student who was applying for visas? Were they a problem?

BOLSTER: Oh yes. There were tremendous problems. There were unrealistic expectations as to what they could do in terms of study. You know, people going to the States to study nuclear engineering even though they didn't know English or had only basic science. I think it is fair to say that the Iranian regime figured that letting students go off on student visas was a way to release some of the pressure that people might otherwise put on the government for change. They really had no limitation on how many people could go overseas. So a family with any money would try to send all or as many as possible of their children off to study, whether in France, Germany, England, the US, whatever, so there was a tremendous pressure to get visas. It didn't matter really what kind of requirements you set up they would all manage to meet them in some way and try to convince you that they deserve a visa. So there was a tremendous pressure. It was very hard to sort out the truth as to why people were going and what their qualifications were.

But it worked both ways, we also knew there were many fraudulent I-20s coming, these were forms the American schools do to welcome a foreign student to come to their school. We knew that these things were turned out by some fly-by-night school, dozens and dozens of blank forms, signed and sent to counselors in a bazaar in Iran who would then get a student and sell an I-20 to him in exchange for a briefing on how to get a visa. When we tried to find out about this back through the Department and Justice, we were eventually told by several Congressmen that it was none of our business to look into whether these I-20s were correct or not, just to give the visas and not raise trouble.

So it was a very difficult situation. We knew from some of the feedback that some of these students were not going to the schools where they were supposed to go. They would be assigned to some school on the East Coast and they would try to enter from San Francisco. The INS was constantly sending us notes about various people who had changed their status or never showed up where they were supposed to go to school. It was a mess.

Q: After your time as consular officer which section did you go to?

BOLSTER: I went into the political section and basically did reporting on the reform program and internal Iranian developments.

Q: What was the difference between the view from Tabriz and the view from Tehran from your point of view? Did you have to work mostly through the bureaucracy in Tehran or were you able to get out?

BOLSTER: I could get out. Tehran had its own consular district so we would work in trips. In fact, I found out about some studies that had been done at Tehran University about various villages. They were sort of sociological and economic studies. I got hold of these studies which had already been translated into English, so I had sort of a benchmark as to what this village was like at a particular time. It was very detailed giving names of farmers and possessions. I then used these studies and went to visit some of the same villages where I would go in and look up some of the same people and ask how things had changed in the intervening time. I was able to get a specific sense of what kind of progress they had made. I visited some of these villages a couple of times which gave me a further measure of how things were going.

Q: Was "progress" the operative word?

BOLSTER: Yeah, it really was. It might be small things like someone buying a bicycle and they hadn't had one before. Or getting a radio.

Q: When you think about it these are tremendous jumps.

BOLSTER: Yes, they really are. For us it sounds very minor, but it was not for someone who has never had a bicycle to suddenly get one and be able to ride off. If there was a road which had been built near his village he is now able to get his produce to market quicker. If his wife became sick he would be able to get help for her which he couldn't before because it was difficult to get to a village. A lot of things like that were a sign of progress. There were some things like the Health Corps that the Shah started, and the Literacy Corps. I visited villages where I talk with Literacy Corpsman at some of the same villages I had study data on. I talked with them about what it was like being in the village, their training before they came there, whether they felt they were accomplishing any changes in the village. Some of them really identified with the villagers and actually got into trouble for sort of organizing the villagers against landlords or former landlords. So there were a lot of interesting subjects like that that I got into.

Q: Did you feel that at any time the ruling class were trying to capture the Embassy?

BOLSTER: There was a distinct problem because if people didn't have the language they really couldn't do much except with people who spoke English or French. So there was a problem that way. I felt many times the contacts that more senior people in the Embassy had were so focused on the somewhat Westernized intelligentsia that it was difficult to keep a total balance. I could have done more than I did, obviously, but I did try while I was there to meet with a lot of people who did not normally have contact with the Embassy.

One of my assignments was to cover the political opposition so I did make contact with various people. I met them for lunch or in obscure spots just for brief talks. This, of course, didn't escape notice. The Savak was well aware.

Q: Savak being the Secret Police.

BOLSTER: Yes, they kept a close eye on all diplomats to see who they talked to, etc. So I knew there was no way I could visit people without it being known, but the Shah's attitude was that as long as contacts with the opposition was at a fairly low level in the Embassy it was not a problem.

One of my interesting interviews there was with Arsanjani. This was after he had been Ambassador in Rome and had come back and was working as a lawyer there. I wanted to talk to him because I had been so impressed with the land reform program that he had started and I wanted his views. We had quite a long conversation. I sought Ambassador Holmes' permission in advance because I didn't want to see Arsanjani if I thought I would upset the Iranian government. But he said it would be fine.

So I had about an hour with him. We had a very interesting conversation, all in Farsi. It was helpful to me having been in Tabriz and knowing a lot of the technical details of land reform; the Persian terms for various types of reform, and various technical terms. How the land is divided up. There are all kinds of very special terms. If you don't know them you can't talk to someone that well about the program. But having known all that I could talk to Arsanjani, and we really had quite a good conversation on it.

Q: What was your impression and was your impression different from some of the others of the Shah and his effectiveness? Again we are talking about this particular time during the mid-sixties.

BOLSTER: Well, I was one of the people who had a somewhat jaundiced view of the Shah. I thought he had done quite a few good things for the country. I think he was sincere in wanting to lead his country into the modern day. He did want to do a lot. He did have some feelings about the need to give the women the right to vote. Some of these things that became part of his whole reform program were deeply held. But on the other hand I think he was very stiff and distant to his own people. He really didn't know how to talk with Iranians except people of his social status. He was surrounded by people who told him what they wanted him to hear or what he wanted to hear. He desperately needed people to tell him things like they were, but he didn't have very many people like that. He had a few, but most people were sycophants who simply told him everything was wonderful and he was greatly beloved, etc. He was not loved by the people. He was respected and followed because Iranians like a strong leader. They had been accustomed to that over the centuries. But he was certainly not loved in the sense that we would think of people loving their leader.

Q: What about while you were there what were the roles of AID and CIA? Did you feel that these were playing a major roles? Were there problems with this? Again from your point of view at that time.

BOLSTER: Certainly AID had played a major role...I am using past tense because by the time I got to Iran the real heyday of Point Four was passing. The numbers of people and the projects were on the downward trend by the time I got there in 1961. But it had a very good reputation because people had seen the literal changes that had taken place. They even talked about American chickens. They wanted to buy an American chicken in the bazaar because they were fat, plump enjoyable chickens, quite different from the scrawny variety they had had before. Wells had been drilled. Malaria had been pretty much eradicated by these tremendous spraying programs. One of the familiar sights in a village was spray painted letters DDT and the date when they had sprayed that village. They just wrote it on the mud wall so that people coming later would know that village had been sprayed. There were all kinds of things like that that people associated with Point Four that were good.

On the other hand the CIA's role was uniformly thought of as bad. Everyone referred back to 1953, when Mossadeh was in his ascendancy and then was overthrown in a complicated street demonstration that has been overplayed in terms of what the CIA actually did. I have read some studies since then that go into great detail saying that the CIA role was fairly small. It was mainly an Iranian show where different factions were jockeying for power and those in favor of the Shah and the Generals won out over Mossadeh and some leftists who were trying to influence Mossadeh. Although Mossadeh was not leftist himself he did need their support in order to have any power. But the fact that this had happened everyone just described that to the CIA which had just pushed a button and brought the Shah back. Therefore anything that happened that the Shah did that was bad was our fault because we had put him on the throne again in 1953. So if he didn't do everything right it was our fault.

Simple things like a street not being paved, whatever, was described to the Americans because they brought back the Shah who wasn't doing the right thing.

Q: You then left Iran in 1966 and came back to the Department and served in INR for two years.

BOLSTER: Yes. I was the analyst covering Iran at the time.

Q: Did you get any different impression? You were back in Washington and also getting, I assume some input from CIA, etc., did you have the feeling that Washington had a good idea of the Iran that you knew quite well by this time?

BOLSTER: Well, there was a tremendous range of reporting coming in. Not only the official reporting from our posts, but we were also open to academic and other sources of information. We knew a lot about what was going on. I wrote a study on political dynamics in Iran when I was the analyst and I was able to be a little more critical of the Shah and his regime than I was in Tehran. I had been subject to a little bit of control by our political counselor who wanted everything said, he wanted to have the political opposition covered and all that, but he always came down to these grandiose phrases about how the Shah was the lynch pin of our interests in Iran and without him the whole thing would fall apart.

So that was clearly the line, as much as we wanted democracy and other people to be part of the power structure, we were in the end dependent on the Shah.

When I got back in this political dynamics study I tried to be a little more objective and point out some of the weaknesses of the Shah's government over time without any institution being allowed to be built up at all because they might threaten him, the country was basically weak. Without some kind of structure like that when the Shah did eventually pass from the scene through accident, coup d'etat, whatever, the country would be in a mess.

Of course this was not very popular when it was received back in the Embassy. I got some heat indirectly from a later Ambassador, Armin Meyer. He wrote back to the head of INR that they didn't think my reporting was very helpful.

Q: I would think that anytime when you say everything is dependent on one person it can be nice but people do pass from the scene, sometimes violently, and you have to think about the future.

BOLSTER: Well, we did studies, in fact fairly frequently about "the unthinkable." But at the end one came down to the fact that the Shah is still running everything so we are stuck with him until some major change comes along.

Q: We can think of leaders like Fidel Castro in Cuba who has been there for more than 30 years. There was Haile Selassie, Tito, etc.

BOLSTER: But then you can also think of people like Syngman Rhee and others who passed from the scene and left quite a bit of chaos behind for a while. There were always these problems.

I did make another prediction while I was in this INR job. As much as we wanted the Iranians to be dependent on us for military hardware, it was very likely that he would go and buy something from the Soviets. There had been rumors of things they were considering, etc. I more or less made this prediction that he would do it. Ambassador Meyer felt that was quite unhelpful to our policies there, as if the classified study was being read by anybody outside the US government.

But, sure enough, they did. The Shah did turn to the Soviets and bought some military equipment for the very reasons I had predicted. That he would do this to appear to the world to be less beholden to the West than would otherwise be the case. Anyway that was more or less the way things went during my two years in INR.

Q: Then you made a switch that you don't see too often in a career such as yours where you were dealing mainly with political issues. You moved to the Economic Bureau, is that right?

BOLSTER: Yes, I had always felt, particularly because of my service in Iran and Cambodia, that there was such a close link between economic development and political factors that I thought a person who just studied politics without economics right behind it was not going to be really able to be as accurate in predictions and as understanding as to what is going on. So I felt I should get into the economic activities. I didn't want to change cone necessarily.

Q: Cone being a specialty.

BOLSTER: A specialty for the whole career. But I did want to get a grounding in economics, so I volunteered for this economic course at FSI.

Q: What were you doing in the Economic Bureau from 1969-71?

BOLSTER: I was in the Office of Fuels and Energy which was the office dealing with oil crises at the time, and natural gas issues, coal, etc. It was a fascinating time because it was just when oil prices were beginning to work their way up because in Libya the Occidental Company had found large amounts of oil and were developing that for the Libyans and they were beginning to put the pressure on to get more revenue for their oil. Armand Hammer was bitterly hated by other people in the industry because he was willing to make some concessions to the Libyans. When he made concessions the Iranians insisted on similar concessions so prices started going up and up.

I was fortunate to be in that office under Jim Akins, who I still consider to be an extremely competent, indeed, brilliant, analyst of the politics and economics of the oil industry. I think he has gotten somewhat of a bum rap because some people look back on that period as if he should be held responsible in part for the price increases because they said that since he was calling attention to all these factors that were pressing the price up he in effect had partly caused it. And that is ridiculous because we were so fortunate for so many years not to have had producing countries demanding more revenue as it was. Oil prices were so low back in that period that it is hard to imagine. I mean \$3 and \$4 a barrel.

Q: At that time what was the driving force of American policies from the Fuels Office?

BOLSTER: It was highly complex. In some areas we wanted to increase production, we wanted more oil to be found and in plentiful supply so that the price would be kept down. But in some other situations we wanted to keep the oil out. One of my specific jobs was to work with the Canadians who wanted to send more and more into our northeast from their oil fields. They have a pipeline that runs eastward from their main oil fields. This oil could be had at a very inexpensive price at the time. But we were trying to keep that supply limited because independent producers in the US didn't want cheap foreign oil. They wanted to continue to produce oil in Louisiana, Texas, California, etc. to keep their revenues up.

So here I was arguing with the Canadians...we had an agreement with them that they could only put so many barrels of oil per day through this pipeline and only so much can be dropped off in American hands and no more. The Canadians kept saying but it is there and the demand is there. We know the people want it, why won't you take more? So every year we took a little bit more but kept it very limited. I went to one of these conventions of independent producers down in Texas and everywhere I turned I was being attacked for not being stronger in keeping out this Canadian oil. So it was very strange. We were seeing rising production in other places and we wanted lots of dependable supplies coming in, but we also wanted to keep our domestic industry going. So it was a very complicated assignment.

Q: How much did you feel that American oil interests were calling the shots as far as our fuel policy was concerned at that time?

BOLSTER: I don't think they were calling the shots because things were happening so fast in the international market. The pressure from the producing countries, the involvement of leaders like the Shah who had become quite familiar with the oil market and were demanding more and more revenue. They knew prices and supplies and a lot about it. They had oil ministries that knew much, much more than they had in the past because during this time we are talking about-in the fifties and sixties-these producing countries had been sending dozens and dozens of bright young students to the States to our universities to learn petroleum engineering. These guys came back home and after looking over the situation wondered what they were doing letting all this oil go for such a cheap price. There was all that pressure going on on the producers' side.

Our companies were reacting to it because their interests were changing. They had been controlling prices and setting markets and now this was all being taken out of their hands. So they came to see us all the time and told us their problems. We could see the foreign governments' problems and we had to work with both sides and try to come to agreements that would keep dependable supplies available for the American consumer.

So it certainly was not a case of the major companies and independents running things. But then again we were in very close touch with them because we had to know chapter and verse of their problems to analyze what should be done if it was in the national interest to do something about it.

Another aspect which was very complicated was the anti trust aspect because under Anti-Trust rules the companies were not allowed to get together and set prices or arrange production deals, etc. without a waiver from the Justice Department. So we had to have waivers that permitted these people to even come together in meetings with us to tell us what was happening. So there were lots of different aspects.

Q: Did you ever find that a Congressman or Senator from Texas, Louisiana or Oklahoma would come bursting into your office and pound the table?

BOLSTER: There was that sort of thing, sure. Not only pressures from Congress but pressures from the petroleum press which is a highly organized activity. They have something called "Petroleum Intelligence Weekly" which is extremely wired in to what is happening in the energy situation around the world. There is the "Oil Daily" and a whole raft of publications that come out that give analyses of what is happening. They report every detail of what is going on in all different areas. So you have that trade press very much involved. They call you all the time because they want to know what is happening. They have correspondents who are up on the latest developments. They will tell you something that happened over in Saudi Arabia yesterday that they are sure is going to change everything today and you need to be able to give them an answer if you are going to keep on top of this very fast changing world.

Q: It sounds like more than any other place...you really were having to keep track of developments.

BOLSTER: Oh, yes. In fact, to such a degree that Jim Akins would pull out his slide rule and if you could tell him the price at Libya's port he would in a matter of seconds work forward to see what the price would be delivered in Iceland, or Baton Rouge. It was a very fast changing activity and I would say petroleum was the most political of all the economic issues. It is something that is highly charged with political interest on both the part of producing and consuming countries and on developing countries. The poor developing countries in many cases were captives. They had to import oil. They didn't have their own production and there was less of the other fuels making it imperative for them to import oil. They are extremely upset when prices go shooting up which they were during this period. We complained but could deal with it more easily than some poor country that was barely making it economically.

Q: You left there and spent a year at the University of Wisconsin from 1971-72. What were you doing there?

BOLSTER: I was on what they called the Research and Writing Fellowship. Basically this is to study a particular issue. I chose land reform as an issue. After studying that in the course of the year, while taking whatever courses you want in terms of academic activity, you were to write something for publication on the basis of your research. So I attended the University of Wisconsin because they had, and still have, what they call the Land Tenure Center which is partially funded by AID, but its focus is on land tenure around the world. So I attended some classes there and also went to classes in the Center for Development. I found it a very interesting year. A good chance to get to know students and find out what they were thinking those days.

Q: This was right in the middle of Vietnam.

BOLSTER: Yes, I got my first whiff of tear gas right there on campus.

Q: As a State Department person did you find yourself in the middle of angry debates, etc.?

BOLSTER: Definitely, yes. In fact several of my fellow students were convinced that we had done in Allende in Chile in a very backhanded way. That we had been behind the scenes and had overthrown him. They got a lot of material from Jack Anderson that had been mentioned in the press and they confronted me with that. So we had some lengthy debates about all of these issues.

And, of course, the Vietnam War...the bombing of Haiphong harbor happened when I was there and there were protests, demonstrations. I was also interested in the way that some of the students turned to these issues as study subjects. Rather than just protest they actually organized study sessions where they studied in great detail the involvement of American companies in making items of war, the effect on the populace... They really did a lot of constructive work in the sense of understanding the background of these issues.

Q: Was it constructive or was it pointed? Were the conclusions of the studies foreordained before going into them?

BOLSTER: Well, that is hard to say. I attended a few sessions where some Quaker groups told about some of the effect of certain sensors that we sowed in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam. Sensors that were dropped from planes and made to look like bushes. They dropped into the ground and sat there until something came near and then would report that there was something in the area. All they could sense was movement so they didn't know whether it was Viet Cong or a water buffalo. So many times apparently there were strikes called up to bomb certain areas where these devices had simply checked a movement of a water buffalo. They had this information in great detail along with pictures. They knew who manufactured certain items and then they would find out what other items were produced by that same company and urged their friends to stop buying the other items. Anyway I thought it was quite interesting to see all this happening right on the campus around me.

Q: Then you went to New Delhi for two years. What were you doing there?

BOLSTER: I was the executive assistant to the Ambassador and then worked subsequently in the political section.

Q: Who was the Ambassador you were working for?

BOLSTER: I was actually working for the Chargé d'Affaires because just before I went out to India, Keating, who had been the Ambassador, resigned and came back to the States. So I worked for the Chargé who was Galen Stone. I found India just a fascinating place, again for some of the same things I had been studying...land reform, agricultural reform. The chance to learn a little bit about that was interesting.

Q: You arrived just after the last major Indo-Pak war. Wasn't that so?

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: The one in 1971 fought over Bangladesh. How was that playing out when you were there?

BOLSTER: Well, there was a lot of criticism of the US because we had sent the carrier, Enterprise up into the...

Q: This was our tilt towards Pakistan as Kissinger put it.

BOLSTER: Yes, that was brought up all the time by the Indians. There was just a litany of complaints about that. It was a bit of a difficult time because everything that we did was scrutinized so carefully to see again if we were still tilting. No matter what we said there was something wrong with it.

Of course, if we were too friendly with the Indians we would get complaints at our Embassy in Islamabad that we were tilting towards India now. Any conversation you had in India seemed to eventually lead to the Indo-Pak differences in one way or another.

Q: It sounds sort of like Israel and the Arab world.

BOLSTER: Yes. It really is. I felt there was a tendency to consciously play off Americans against the Soviets. The Indians made such a show of being friendly to the Soviets during this period. The President of the Soviet Union came to visit. Mrs. Gandhi went to Moscow. There were quite a few visits and agreements back and forth. It seemed that the Indians were trying to tell us that despite all we had done for them don't think they are in our pocket.

Q: Developing a close relationship with the Soviet Union in a way looking at it even at the times basically was unnatural. I mean here is a democracy wrestling with the problems of a huge country all split up and all and yet trying to appear close to what was a totalitarian empire. A completely different system.

BOLSTER: True but the relationship was a counter weight to China too because there was the fighting on the border in 1962 with the Chinese. So that was still in the Indian mind too. They needed Soviet ties as a balance against China. If the Chinese again thought of doing anything along the border they would know the Soviets would help India. So it was part of the great power balancing game again.

But it was also a time when the US was winding down its AID program. I always loved the play on words that Ambassador Moynihan used when he came later...I, of course, was working for and under him. He called the fact that we had had this AID program which was now declining, but just at the time that we were declining. We had this enormous AID complex that was built out there away from the city that had apartments, offices, bowling alley, etc. He called this the "edifice complex"; when a program is declining it gets enormous buildings. Then we had to decide what to do with these buildings because they were only partly used and the program was winding down. So eventually we worked out a way to present it to the Indians to be used by them.

We also during his time handed back the largest amount of foreign exchange ever transmitted in one check which was surplus rupees that were turned back to the Indians. By giving them aid for which people...they used the aid to buy tractors and people paid for the tractors and all these rupees that paid for the tractor purchase with USAID was then put into a fund to be used in joint projects of the Indian and US governments. Particularly for developments in India but also for...we purchased all kinds of furniture and...

Q: Oh, I remember we were all told to try to buy tickets through our rupee fund.

BOLSTER: Yes, that is right. We tried every way we could possibly think to use the money. But there were billions of dollars in rupees that could never be used. So Moynihan worked out a way to hand back most of these rupees to the Indian government. In effect saying that you don't need to worry that we are going to demand dollars for these, you just have them back. This will erase one of the problems overhanging our relationship. So that was done when I was there.

Q: What was your impression...Moynihan was one of these, now a Senator, who had been Ambassador to the United Nations and had joined a host of other American Ambassadors who are basically political appointees who found India a delightful stage, or appeared to be, to demonstrate their, among other things, their ego. How did you find Moynihan as an Ambassador?

BOLSTER: Well he thoroughly enjoyed his tour there, I think, because he is always provocative and has so many ideas. He is a really intellectual giant. He benefitted greatly from being in India, just absorbing information about this fascinating country and the surrounding area. He visited other countries. He went to Bhutan, Nepal. He did a lot of traveling and, I think, learned a tremendous amount while he was there.

I think he was a bit frustrated, particularly at the beginning because whatever he said might be picked apart by the local press, so he began to have a very low profile after his first few weeks and months there. He wanted to be in a learning mode and not rock the boat. But then he gradually became more influential.

But I think he found it a little bit tough to deal with Indians because they were so unpredictable as to how they would react to things and not necessarily open to a typical Irish warm embrace. They are very aloof in some ways and have their own way of doing things and don't want to be pressured or pushed into doing things our way.

So it was a bit of a trial for him in that sense, but he did learn a lot during the time he was there.

Q: Did we have any major issues or problems during this period of time when you were there?

BOLSTER: Yes, we certainly had one which was the explosion of a nuclear weapon by the Indians before I left. That was a major development. Aside from that I don't think there were any really serious problems. There was the constant reiteration of problems over relations with Pakistan. Every time something was going to be done for one country or the other, there was criticism in the other country. Every year when we had to make decisions about military assistance there were the debates of who was getting more, who was going to have the upper hand, etc. So there were constant problems like this, but it just became something you got used to because it was constantly there.

Q: There has been this saying that as far as India and Pakistan are concerned that when the Democrats are in they are more Indian and when the Republicans are in they are more Pakistani. Did you have any feel that there was more of an infinity of one of our Presidents from one Party or other for one or the other side?

BOLSTER: Not really. Of course, you would have to say that Moynihan is an example of someone who is going back and forth. He worked for Democratic and Republican Presidents.

Q: And now he is a Democratic Senator.

BOLSTER: Of course there were major developments back here in the domestic political scene that had their echoes out there. The Watergate scandal had occurred and this was debated everywhere, but particularly in India because as a democracy and with particular interest in Britain and the US, they analyzed every tiny detail.

Q: Did they understand the Watergate business? I was in Greece at the time and they really never understood what the fuss was about.

BOLSTER: Oh, I don't think most people understood it, no. Not really.

Q: I am not saying understood all the complications, but why the Americans should get so upset over a president lying and doing a little bit of political espionage.

BOLSTER: Yes, that was considered to be sort of a typical American overreaction. But it did have quite an effect on us in the Embassy because it was such a major issue coming up all the time.

Q: Had the recognition of China already happened before you arrived? The Kissinger trip and then the Nixon trip used Pakistan as sort of a channel.

BOLSTER: Yes, I think that had happened. There was a lot of eyebrow raising on that...

Q: Because you were pushing two buttons, China and Pakistan, on that one.

BOLSTER: Yes. But then again I think the Indians always felt it was unnatural for us not to have had relations with China anyway. They had their problems with China over this border issue, but I think they still thought that it was strange that we for so long had cut ourselves off from the Chinese.

Q: Sometimes there is a policy or view of the situation in Washington which is quite different from the view at the Embassy. Did you have any problem like that?

BOLSTER: No, I think if anything people in the Embassy were unhappy that so little was thought about India in Washington. India was such a big country and had been so important and we had big names as Ambassadors in the past, sent large Embassy staffs... There was gradually a sort of feeling that India was being ignored back in Washington no matter was being reported. It was sort of in one ear and out the other.

Q: I assume this still remains the case today?

BOLSTER: All these speeches about wonderful relations between the two main democracies, etc. were constant fixtures in speeches but in plain fact India was becoming less important to the US by the day. It affected relationships a great deal.

Also against the background of the Vietnam War...we have to look at that too because the Indians were very much opposed to our involvement in Vietnam. There was constant criticism of our fighting there. We had demonstrations at the Embassy.

Q: Did you find that a reporting cable would go out from Islamabad and then it would be almost necessary for New Delhi to send out its cable? In a way the Embassies really were almost like foreign powers instead of representing the same United States.

BOLSTER: Yes that is right. It was more than just India, Pakistan and the US because you would get Ambassadors in other countries weighing in. Tehran, for example, had views. Sri Lanka had views, although, of course, less important in the big picture. People in Moscow would come in with their analysis of the situation. You sometimes would get a dozen info addressees on cables and files were just filled with analyses from all these posts. But I think that is a typical problem in our Foreign Service. We tend to get too many different views from all over the place. Everyone wants to get into the act and you end up with a tremendous number of cables flying back and forth. People hardly have time to read it all there is so much material.

Q: Then you left from there and from 1974-76 went back to Tehran again.

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: What were you doing there?

BOLSTER: I went back to be deputy head of the political section because the person who had been assigned to be head of the political section did not have the language and they felt they needed someone as his deputy who spoke Farsi. So I somewhat reluctantly agreed to go back to Tehran. My family was not too excited about returning to Tehran either. I did have the advantage of reestablishing ties with people I had known earlier and try to get an idea of change in the meantime and get some perspective of what was happening. I thought it was rewarding in a career sense.

Q: From a representational sense it certainly made sense to have somebody there who could give some... How had the situation changed from your viewpoint?

BOLSTER: Well, Iran had become beset with what I call a Klondike mentality. It was like the gold rush days in Alaska. There was so much money pouring out of the oil exports that the Shah and his people just had no limit as to what they saw themselves capable of doing. There was going to be a brand new airport built. There was going to be a subway system built under Tehran. Roads were going to be built everywhere. A whole new city was going to be built between Tehran and the villages up north. They were going to have a whole diplomatic enclave and the largest square in the world was going to be built up there...the Square of the Shah and the People. It was going to be bigger than the Kremlin's square, bigger than Tiananmen Square in China. All the embassies were going to have to move up there, buy land and build new embassies because it was going to be a whole new diplomatic quarter.

Just one project after another. Their desires far outstripped their ability to achieve these things.

Q: This is the thing, money is not everything. You have to have the infrastructure to build.

BOLSTER: That is right. My favorite story about that is one that was told me by an Iranian I knew who was in office machines and computers. He said that they were having all these tremendous orders for computers by various ministries, some of them competing with each other to get his equipment, etc. He said that down in Khorramshahr he had observed an enormous computer on a pallet that was to be picked up by a freight forwarder and sent on to one of these ministries. As the forklift truck neared this enormous computer they didn't have the prongs set directly inside the pallet and they just pierced the whole side of the computer. He said it was just a typical example. There was just a tremendous number of orders. In fact there were literally tens of thousands of enormous containers in the port down there. There was so much stuff coming in they couldn't find it all. You had to pay freight forwarders to go and find your particular shipment and convince someone to move that shipment before other ones, get it on the railroad and up to Tehran.

There were just so many things going on. You had a sense that things were moving faster and faster but they weren't getting anywhere.

Q: Were you there when Joseph Farland and Richard Helms were Ambassadors?

BOLSTER: Only when Helms was Ambassador.

Q: He had been head of the CIA. What was the feeling as him as an Ambassador?

BOLSTER: He was excellent really. Very much on top of everything that was going on. He was extremely organized. From his training in the CIA he was extremely perceptive at asking questions and keeping tabs on a wide variety of subjects. He was fantastically well organized. He could do in one day what would take most people three or four days. He was ready to leave at 5:30. He had cleaned everything up and written all the cables about meeting with the Shah, or whatever. Just extremely competent.

I do think that he fell too into this trap that I mentioned earlier of having more contacts with the Western oriented intelligentsia. He certainly tried to have fairly broad contacts, but I think they fell mainly in that circle. But he was receptive to information from those of us who were in touch with other Iranians. He was quite willing to have our reporting sent in, more so than his DCM, Jack Miklos who I many times had to struggle with to get views that I thought should be in Washington through him because he didn't want to say things that were too derogatory about the Shah.

Q: Prior to the Ford Administration when Nixon and Kissinger were there, there seemed to be an almost complete ban on anything negative about the Shah as far as our reporting. People in our Embassies felt under tremendous restraints. The Shah would hear of anything negative that we would report and this would cause unhappiness. And whatever the Shah wanted we would do because of money and also because of Kissinger's feeling about using Iran as one of the counterweights to the Soviet Union. Did you feel that? Kissinger was still Secretary of State.

BOLSTER: I think our reporting was accurate in the sense that we tried to give a complete picture. We tried to show areas of strengths and areas of weakness. We certainly showed how decisions were often poorly made because the Shah was not well served by his advisers. I think we showed that he had a much better grasp of world events and international politics than he had knowledge of his own country. I never felt he was all that well informed or that adroit at handling situations within his own country. He was much more at ease talking with a foreign ambassador about what was going on in his country than he was talking with a Mullah or a businessman or anybody else. He did have a wide range of people who gave him information. We had always been told that he had not only sycophants but other people who told things to him fairly straight. People he would get in to play bridge or poker or just to come by late at night to talk to him. He did have all kinds of sources, but you still had the feeling that he really was not very objective about his own country.

Some of the grandiose pronouncements about the wonderful things that Iran was going to do just became rather silly. He said things like...He didn't want to copy the West because it was falling apart. The work ethic was dead. The West was decadent and so many of its problems were the kind of things they didn't want in Iran. So they wanted a synthesis of the things from the West that were good but grafted on to basic values of our wonderful society. We were going to lead ourselves into this wonderful future where everybody was going to be wealthy.

It became more and more unrealistic, the way he talked about these things. You could read quotes from his speeches in the press and wonder where he was getting this all from and how he thought he was going to be able to achieve half...He was talking about Iran passing countries like Holland, Italy, Belgium, getting right up there among the top five or six countries in the world in terms of running world affairs, etc. It was really heady stuff. He really thought Iran was going to be one of the movers and shakers in the world.

Q: Was there any concern about the tremendous amount of American arms that were coming in there? I recall at the time that we were making a lot of oil money but we were building up a huge Iranian military.

BOLSTER: There was a great deal of concern about that. Not only within the official family but also in Congress. Remember Congress had numerous questions about whether the Iranians could use all the equipment they were getting. They even sent a couple of staffers out to look into the absorption capacity, as they put it, of the Iranian military.

Americans who were involved with it very closely had many doubts. For example, there were people employed by Bell Helicopter to train Iranian pilots down in Isfahan at an enormous base they had created. There were occasional mishaps from helicopters crashing into each other. On the one hand these people who were advising Iranians and training them were impressed by the drive that was shown. The Shah had given orders that this was a priority project. He wanted an enormous military, he wanted helicopters everywhere and he wanted them trained immediately. So the Generals saluted and went into great organizing schemes. Eventually you had all these recruits that were screened in some way. They tried to pick the more promising people and put them in a class and started teaching air dynamics and all these things.

People who saw this up close wondered how it would be possible to take some of these students who really were poorly served by their own educational background and suddenly make them into capable helicopter pilots. Helicopter training is no simple thing even for one of our young people who is very well trained in physics, chemistry, etc. through out educational system. It still takes a lot of training to become adept at flying a helicopter.

When you take somebody who had education in a rote system where you chant the Koran and chant the letters of the alphabet and chant solutions to math problems...this kind of rote learning does not really produce someone who is well equipped to learn how to fly a helicopter. At least in my opinion. They had awful times trying to educate these kids into being safe pilots. You got a number of pilots who were pretty aggressive but you weren't sure whether they were all that safe. I shouldn't sell them short. They had some very excellent fighter pilots for example that came up in the Iranian air force, trained in the US and were very capable pilots. But that was a very determined long range program. But this helicopter business down in Isfahan was practically overnight. We kept joking about the "crash program" because there were some crashes. The people who were involved in it were just shaking their heads because they just didn't feel the program was workable. It was just going too far too fast.

Q:Was there concern within the political section about the tremendous number of American technicians?

BOLSTER: Yes, there was because in so many cases they were just not well-qualified and well-briefed before they came over. They didn't really understand what it was like to start living in a Moslem country. One of the most egregious examples was that some of these helicopter instructors had been in Vietnam as single guys. You know, young, hot shot instructors, etc. Before they left Vietnam some of them had taken instant wives, some of whom were bar girls they had consorted with. They had to leave the country almost overnight when things phased down and some of them had quickie marriages and off they went back to the States. Then they got word that there was this big opportunity in Iran so some of these people came out and some of the wives got together and formed a house of ill repute right there in Isfahan that was taking care of some of these American instructors, etc. who were foot loose and fancy free. This took place right in some of the guys' homes. The wife would entertain when the husband was away from home.

The Iranians saw this and thought this was terrible. Here the Americans are supposed to be over here showing us how to live, modern ways of living. They are showing us how to fly helicopters but at the same time they are destroying our morals because here they are just openly having this development right in their community that just flaunts itself in our faces.

That was an egregious example, but there were so many problems of people essentially coming in without any briefing on what it was like to live in a Moslem country, how they should behave. I would hear stories about American girls in shorts riding motorcycles roaring through the countryside, shopping, etc. This was just scandalous to people who have very strict standards of what women should wear.

The sensibilities were just ignored by so many of these people who came in. That in turn gave the Iranians a sort of bad impression of the West. Do we want to be so closely associated with the West or not? There were all these articles in the paper about the bad things that come with Western influence. You even saw in universities a bit of movement back to wearing the cadre, the covering from head to foot that conservative Moslem women in Iran wear. For years the Shah had been encouraging women to come out, take jobs, have the vote, and all these things, but there was this sort of sub rosa return to basic values.

I heard this all the time from people who either taught at the university or were students there that there were far more chadors seen again and that there was this feeling that because of so many bad influences from the West the way to root them out was to go back to the old ways. So there was this undercurrent of uneasiness and unhappiness about the degree to which the Shah's government was tied to the West.

Q: But at that time how did we feel about the influence of the Mullahs and the fundamentalists? How did one view the stability of the regime?

BOLSTER: I think it has to be said that we still did not give as much attention to the religious dimension as we should have. We did occasionally talk about it and have discussions, but I think there was a feeling that the Mullahs were really pretty much the heavy hand of the past and that while we couldn't ignore their influence, they were just viscerally against any kind of progress and therefore you just couldn't do too much about it. It was just an Iranian thing that they had to resolve. The Shah was trying to diminish the influence of the clergy. We just had to watch and hope that would be the case. They would not be allowed to stand in the way of progress.

So I think in the context of the situation there we did not give enough importance to the strong influence of religious leaders, combined with some very interesting technical details, namely the cassette. Khomeini had been behind the riots of 1963 that were so heavily put down by the government and there were so many casualties. After that he was exiled from the country. Sent first to Iraq and then eventually he moved to France and we know the story of that.

While he was in Iraq, for years he was sending tape recorded sermons back to Iran by the thousands. They were distributed very efficiently by the old religious structure...Mullahs, students, etc. They would play these speeches in the mosque every Friday where people would get together for the service. They would want to hear the latest tape. Whenever the government heard about this they would go and seize these cassettes and destroy them. But there were so many, they were just proliferating all over the country because at the same time people were buying Western music...we would hear American songs all over the place. At the same time that same tape recorder could be used to play one of Khomeini's cassettes on Friday. He would rail away at the evil ways of the West.

Q: Were these cassettes raising any blip on the political section's radar?

BOLSTER: Yes, they were mentioned. But it is hard to gauge just how deep the influence is. You know they are happening and that the government is trying to seize them because they know they are a bad influence, but it is hard to gauge really how many people are moved by them. But they clearly were. An important landmark came when the Status of Forces Agreement was being debated in the parliament. This was an agreement that we had to have for our military and aid people there in case there were accidents that they would be treated in a way that would accord with our legal system. Obviously if an American military person was subject to Iranian justice this wouldn't be acceptable in his hometown or family. So we had these arrangements with the Iranian government that we would regularize the status of American personnel serving in Iran. It was really not that nefarious, it was simply a kind of agreement that we had worked out with many other countries.

But as it was debated in Iran it took on a whole different character because it was portrayed by enemies of the government as the Iranian government bowing to the West in a total way. That is they called it a return to the previous system of capitulations which you had in the Middle East where Westerners enforced their system on the countries of that area. So the Iranians said...What has happened? We have become independent, have run our affairs for all these years and now we are going right back to the same system of decades ago when the foreigners tried to control everything that happened here.

Khomeini played this to the tilt. He had all these sermons that were pointed to this particular agreement. It became such an issue in Iran that the parliament debated the issue and almost voted it down. The government had enough of control to vote it through, but there were so many people who voted against it that suddenly this rubber stamp Majlis (Parliament) which had stood up on its hind legs and fought this Status of Forces Agreement had really opened peoples eyes because it was unheard of that the Majlis would...I was fortunate enough to go there to the Majlis when they were debating and voting on this issue.

So it was a fascinating period to be watching Iranian history. I think there were so many little things like that that added up in people's mind to a gradual lost of faith in the Shah's judgment and political wisdom of how he was running the country. And they began to see him as vulnerable too. Of course, all the later upheavals took place after I left. It was in 1979 that the Shah finally left.

People have asked me if I could foresee his fall when I left in 1976 and I always say no. There was no way to see how fast he would disintegrate in terms of his power. When I left in 1976 he had military power, police power, Savak power, all these institutions were his. Yet, as I had said many years ago in my political dynamics study without institutions that give the government lasting strength his control was more apparent than real, that is his control over the situation. And that was borne out by events a few years later.

Q: Well, you came back and for a while you were seconded to the Department of Commerce and the Department of Energy. Is that right?

BOLSTER: Yes. This was actually a return to my previous work in fuels and energy because at Commerce I was working on oil issues and then when I went over to Energy we worked on oil, gas, coal and other issues. This was, of course, a changed situation because by then the oil prices had risen quite high. The producing countries had gained so much more power that they were beginning to lust for way back there in 1969 when I had been in that work in 1969 to '71. So it was quite a changing world, but nevertheless interesting.

I was in Energy when it was formed so I got to see that sort of from the inside as they struggled to get organized and watched Mr. Schlesinger run that enormous Department which gathered together a whole bunch of disparate groups. Some had been in Commerce, some separate agencies like Energy Research and Development Administration. Some people in Commerce who had been on the energy conservation side were brought in. It was just an amalgamation of everything that had to do with energy in one Department.

Q: Did you sense at that time, because so much of energy is concerned with foreign issues, that State was sort of losing power or the outlook towards energy was moving away...be more what is good for the United States as far as policy development than sort of what is good for American position but we have to consider the whole world...?

BOLSTER: That is a hard question. There obviously was some rivalry between the Department of Energy (DOE) and State because something just as simple as sending a delegation to OECD oil meeting in Paris would be...who would head it, who is going to be on the delegation, how many people from each agency, etc. So this kind of issue came up.

No, I think DOE got caught up in the same dichotomy we did of relations with producing countries, relations with American firms, public, the oil press. All these influences coming to bear from all sides. I think they got caught up very soon in the same kind of issues that we had dealt with.

State's Office of Fuels and Energy, by the way, had much expanded since the time I was there. There were only four of us. Later there were, I think, at least eight or nine and they had a Producing Affairs Office, and Consuming Affairs Office. Since that time Energy and State have had further reorganizations. I think DOE is somewhat less active in international oil activities.

But, anyway, I was present at the creation and in the midst of things I got a call saying that there was a chance to go out to Antwerp as Consul General.

Q: How was that as an assignment?

BOLSTER: Well...

Q: You did that from 1978-81.

BOLSTER: That was extremely enjoyable and worthwhile from a career standpoint. I had actually asked to be assigned to Belgium for years. Having come into the Service with both French and Dutch it seemed logical that at some point I should serve in a country that has both of those languages. In fact, I had been at one time close to being assigned there but then the job was abolished during one of our periodic cuts. I think that was a BALPA cut...balance of payments cut.

Here was my chance to go to Belgium and get out of the developing world where I had spent my whole career and get to Europe. I took it in a moment.

Q: Were there any points we might hit on here? Antwerp may have fit your language ability and all, but it must have been somewhat of a quieter time?

BOLSTER: It did take a certain amount of adjustment because there is a sort of tight little island mentality there. They are lost in their very detailed Flemish/Walloon differences and battles. Sometimes tiny little problems occupied tremendous amount of space in the press. It was a little hard to get used to how people could get so excited about such very minor problems when I had been dealing with matters of life, death, heat, happiness, survival in these poorer countries.

But it was eye opening to see how complicated Europe is. How historical peoples' attitudes are. They immediately go back to things that happened hundreds of years ago. Of course, people in the Middle East do too, but there is so much of a psychological background in the Middle East. In Europe it seemed to be so much emphasis just on history.

The people were all well off, they don't really have that many economic issues by comparison with developing countries. But political issues have enormous depth and variety.

Q: I am sure the Flemish/Walloon problem did not raise much of a blip on the Department of State radar.

BOLSTER: No it didn't.

Q: Were there things that we did that would somehow set this problem off?

BOLSTER: No, that was really something that was separate. It could cause governments to fall, etc., so in that sense it affected us, but not in a day to day sense. At the same time we had this theater nuclear force issue where we were going to modernize the weapons that had been based in Europe all these years. That became a cause celebre because it found much more opposition as time went on. There were constant demonstrations, press stories, etc. against...

Q: This was during the Carter Administration in which Carter, himself, was waffling on this. We had the so-called neutron bomb and then we withdrew it. It must have been a rather difficult time to get up there and make pronouncements and then not be quite sure what kind of support you would have?

BOLSTER: Yes. Of course there were some very practical consequences of the theater nuclear force modernization. There were going to be bases right near Antwerp, built to take these newer rockets. So it was going to have even an economic affect. But there were a lot of people opposed to the idea even though there would have been economic benefits to their area. So there was a lot of debate back and forth. Of course, since then it has faded from view because we never did do it.

Q: How did you find the opposition? Was there sort of a right and a left or did this cut across the normal political spectrum?

BOLSTER: I think it pretty much cut across. There were somewhat more opposition from the Socialists, less from what they call Liberal, which is really Conservative in Belgium. Also it is a very strong religious issue. The Catholic church was in many cases very much opposed to it. Sermons and so on were against it. There was a lot of conscience examining by Belgians in this period. At the same time they were worried about the Soviet Union. They were all well aware of the power that was behind the Iron Curtain. Belgium was doing its part in NATO. They had exercises every year to practice reinforcing Europe to fight against a possible Soviet invasion.

At the same time they were living very well economically. Belgium was doing quite well. There was plentiful food in the stores. Even people who were laid off from jobs were paid almost full salary for up to almost a year and then gradually phased down. It was a very socialistic country in that sense. It had a high degree of social welfare protection, health insurance, etc. Even a fund to save money for your vacation every year. They had a fund that took money from your salary every month and then gave it to you in April so you could take it and go on vacation for a month.

Q: As Consul General, particularly with this nuclear force issue, did you find yourself out on the hustings giving talks, or were we just keeping our heads down?

BOLSTER: No, I made talks, not specifically on that, but talks of general interest. I got questions about nuclear issues. I got questions about whether the US would ever come to Europe's aid again in the case of a war or would we just give up and let them be conquered. All that kind of question would come up on occasion. I just handled it as best I could. I had some demonstrators once at a talk in Antwerp but I just kept talking, I delivered my speech in Dutch, and tried to ignore these people. They quietly moved away from the podium after making their point.

Q: You came back and got involved in military sales in the political/military side of the Department just when the Reagan Administration came in. You were there from 1981-83. What were your concerns?

BOLSTER: I was particularly involved in security assistance budgeting every year. That is how to divvy up all this multi-billion dollar military assistance budget among all the countries. It was extremely complex because everybody knew what had been given to each country in years past so every change that you proposed was scrutinized minutely. There was a constant drum fire of these requests. First to divvy it up every year but then also to make changes all through the year to take care of emergencies that happened in certain places like Central America. While I was there, Sadat was murdered and it was a question as to whether we could give more to Egypt and Sudan to avoid any problem of instability there. Whatever happened there were ripple effects in everything including security assistance.

Q: The most obvious one has been Greece and Turkey which has always been a problem.

BOLSTER: Yes. In pairs of countries like that they are looked at together to see which one...there is even some ratios...they talk about ratios between Greece and Turkey. We don't say there are any but over the years you can see a certain pattern. If you don't keep that pattern or something close to it then you get terrible complaints from people of the host government and also get complaints from the American Ambassador to that country because then he feels his job is on the line. He is supposed to work for good relations between his own home country and the country where he is assigned. If he is in Turkey, for example, and the Turkish budget is not as high as they thought they were supposed to get then he feels it is a matter of his personal honor that he has to make it well-known back in Washington that he is upset too.

Q: How would these things get resolved?

BOLSTER: They got resolved by people like me just sitting down with sharp pencils and making compromises. We have helicopters that had been destroyed on an air field down in El Salvador. We need to give some emergency help to El Salvador to replace them, so we are going to cut these other countries over here. We will cut these five countries by a little bit and by putting that together we can get enough to move the money to El Salvador. Then, of course, the people who are going to lose money complain bitterly because they have already been promised it. They have been told that this year their amount is going to be this much and you cut them back from that, how are they going to tell that country's government that the amount has been decreased because of an emergency somewhere else?

There are just constant problems like that. You get to see very quickly how the Department works and how decisions have to be many times bucked up the line until people finally give up complaining. If they complain at all the levels where they feel they can it just gets bumped up higher saying we can't do any more than we have done, we have made all the compromises we can and this is what we have to do. Then it gets up to the senior officials and it is either decided by them as the best possible compromise or sometimes these other regional bureaus still try to get through even to the Deputy Secretary or the Secretary and insist on a change being made.

So you see the soft under belly of the Department when you work in a job like that. Sometimes it must be said even beyond professional considerations, there even gets to be personal feelings on occasion vented. You feel that it is not just that you hurt somebody professionally by cutting their country by two million dollars this year, but they personally take it as an insult.

Q: Every time a new administration comes in and particularly one that is either more to the right or to the left, of course the Reagan Administration is more to the right, they have some really hard chargers that come in full of ideology. Did this impact much on what you were doing?

BOLSTER: To some extent. It certainly was in the background. There was right from the beginning a tendency to sell more arms than we had been doing under the Carter Administration because President Carter tried to cut back and give the impression that we were not going to approve every arms sale that came along. The new administration basically said that we are going to deal with the world as it is not as we think it should be or would like it to be. That basically was shorthand for saying, "We are going to sell more arms because that is what people want."

So right away the proposals kept flowing through. Even proposals that might have been held up in the past were then resubmitted. So there was a lot of activity in this area.

Q: Then your final assignment was really for about a year wasn't it?

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: You went to the Economic Bureau to deal with the aviation negotiations. What was that all about?

BOLSTER: It is another very complex field where you learn there are a lot of things you took for granted that are matters for negotiation. Before I went there I didn't realize that down to the number of flights that can be permitted to land in your airports every week and from which companies they can be and who had how many gates and what kind of planes are being used...all of this is a matter of negotiation between countries.

Q: I know in interviewing somebody who was Ambassador to the Netherlands when asked what was the major issues while there, he answered KLM landing rights in Chicago.

BOLSTER: Yes.

Q: And he couldn't get it, but a political appointee came in and was able to get it through the Nixon Administration.

BOLSTER: Yes, these things are negotiated down to the finest detail. On your delegation you always have some airline people and even other people like...the Department of Transportation have specialists and they are part of the delegation. Sometimes the meetings are overseas, sometimes they are here. They are very complex. There is always a background of agreements going back decades in the past so people who are familiar with that particular problem will say to you in chapter and verse what happened in the past few years. So it is a very complex subject with its own terminology and it takes a while to get into it. But when you see these negotiations you see really how many things the State Department does that no one ever hears about or understands.

You might have a negotiation going on three or four days, night and day, with a small group of people just churning away trying to get an agreement on things. And you see all the negotiating techniques used. The pressure from political leaders, and ultimatums that if you don't agree to this in such a time we are going to leave.

Sometimes the denouement at the end is fascinating. When each side has stated their final positions they can't possibly compromise on and then at the last moment everyone realizes that if you don't get an agreement nothing will change from the last time and you would be back on an agreement that you might have negotiated four years ago. Then even that may be a problem. Can we agree that the agreement will continue unchanged? If both sides are dissatisfied with it, then there is pressure to come up with some final agreement. In one case it was not reached until 9 or 10 at night...that was with the Philippines. Whole new drafts are brought forward and the head of each delegation initial. Afterwards it has to be submitted to Congress. So it is a tremendously complex subject matter. I won't say that I penetrated all the nooks and crannies in the year I was there, but I learned a lot.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

BOLSTER: Okay, very good.

End of interview